

Discussion Questions When the Stars Go Dark

1. What did you think about the main character, Anna Hart? What did you like about her? How did she change and grow over the course of the book? How does she finally make peace with her past?
2. When the Stars Go Dark is set in Mendocino, California. How does the setting shape the novel? How did the author bring the small town and its surrounding woods to life for readers?
3. In Chapter 3, McLain writes, “If you think about it, most of us have very little choice about what we’re going to become or who we’re going to love, or what place on earth chooses us, becoming home.” Do you agree? How does this sentiment apply to the characters of the novel?
4. There are a lot of contrasting elements in *When the Stars Go Dark*. Light and dark, for example. Good and evil, lost and found, courage and fear, to name a few more. What other contrasts did you notice? Why do you think these opposing ideas are important to the story?
5. Blame and guilt are big themes throughout the book. How do these themes manifest in the novel? What other central themes are featured?
6. This book is intense at times, grappling with difficult subject matter around trauma. But it’s also beautiful and contemplative. How does McLain balance the emotional registers throughout the novel?
7. Silence and violence are commonly mentioned throughout the book. What do these two words mean in the context of this novel? Which characters have a voice and which are silenced?
8. McLain writes, “I don’t believe forgiveness is something we have to kill ourselves to earn. It’s already here, all around us, like rain. We just have to let it in.” What does this book say about forgiveness? Why do you think forgiving yourself is sometimes the hardest thing to do?
9. What do you think is the author’s message to readers of *When the Stars Go Dark*? What did you take away from the book?
10. Discuss the author’s note at the back of the book. How did reading about McLain’s inspiration for the story influence your feelings about the novel?

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